

Amendments to the Specification:

Please replace the paragraph on beginning on page 6, line 22 with the following amended paragraph:

B1
Handle 20 includes a handhold end 20a and a hinge end 20b. Defined preferably in a central portion of the handle 20 is an elongated opening 50 having two pairs of apertures 52 defined on opposite sides thereof. The elongated opening 50 is adapted to receive the beak member 24. Apertures 52 receive threaded fasteners ~~41~~ fasteners 37 or the like for securing the beak striker plate 54 (via apertures 56) to the handle 20. The beak striker plate 54 includes a striker portion 54a that protrudes through elongated opening 50 and is oriented to be engaged by the beak member 24 when the latch plate assembly 12 is in a closed/latched position. The striker portion 54a includes a cam surface 54b that is engaged by the top of the beak member 24 when the latch plate assembly 12 is being closed. The curved shape of the cam surface 54b causes the beak member 24 to be urged inwardly during closing, thereby loading spring 48. As the beak member 24 reaches the end of the cam surface 54b, the spring 48 is at least partially unloaded, and the beak 24c engages the striker portion 54a. The latch plate assembly 12 is now in the latched/closed position. As shown in FIG. 3, the apertures 56 of the beak striker plate 54 correspond to one of the pairs of apertures 52 in the handle 20. Accordingly, threaded fasteners 37 are received therein for securing the beak striker plate 54 to the handle 20.

Please replace the paragraph on beginning on page 8, line 22 with the following amended paragraph:

B2
The inner shield members 58 are secured to the outer shield member 60 in spaced relation to one another. Preferably, the inner shield members 58 are secured to the outer shield member 60 via threaded fasteners ~~41~~ 141 (either within tapped holes in outer shield member 60 or using nuts). This allows the shaft assembly 14 to be disassembled for maintenance. However, any method of securing the inner shield members 58 to the outer shield member 60 (i.e., welding, gluing, etc.) is within the scope of the present invention. The gap formed between the inner shield members is to accommodate the clevis 64 as described below. The inner shield members 58 have

b2
a semi-tubular portion 58a formed therein and the outer shield member 60 has a semi-tubular portion 60a formed therein. When the inner shield members 58 are secured to the outer shield member 60 the semi-tubular portions 58a and 60a cooperate to form a tube through which the elongated shaft 62 extends. In another embodiment, the elongated shaft 62 can extend through a tube or a pair of tubes that are welded or otherwise secured to the outer shield member 60.
